# Review of The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker

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## BOOKS BRIEFLY NOTED

TOBIAS SMOLLETT. *Humphry Clinker*, ed. Shaun Regan, introd. Jeremy Lewis. London: Penguin, 2008. Pp. 496. £9.99; $13.

Despite the immense popularity of *Humphry Clinker* during the period and its obvious relevance to issues of the time, from freedom of the press to consumerism to British national identity, the novel is notably absent from the catalogues of presses such as Longman, Bedford, and Broadview. Teachers of Smollett are therefore left with few options, most of which tend to overemphasize biographical at the expense of cultural context.

Mr. Lewis's Introduction is an improvement over its Oxford competitor. It offers a brief, suggestive account of Scottish ambivalence toward the Act of Union; touches on changes in the print market and the profession of authorship after the lapse of the Licensing Act; and notes the ideological rift between the moneyed and landed interests over the rising tide of luxury. Mr. Lewis vibrantly compares Scottish and English medical practice. His informative description of the hierarchical relationship between the three branches of medicine (physician, surgeon, apothecary) suggests that Scottish medical education progressed more rapidly because it treated this hierarchy as "increasingly blurred and irrelevant."

He could have elaborated his account of cultural developments. For example, to support his claim that Smollett's views on luxury were out of step with a "spirit of the age" that emphasized its "public benefits," Mr. Lewis offers a brief comparison of Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* and Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, in which he glosses over the time between the two and their vastly different receptions. Arguably, the immense outcry against Mandeville reflects the spirit of his age as much as his own argument, if not more. This outcry also complicates Mr. Lewis's claim that critiques of luxury were on the wane, as do the numerous authors from 1750–1780, from Goldsmith to Frances Burney, who offer unflattering pictures of luxury consumption, though perhaps not so vicious as Smollett's. Finally, readers would be able to make better sense of this debate if Mr. Lewis had placed it within a broader account of the commercial revolution, with information about specific developments, like urbanization and domestic tourism, that are so central to the novel.

Ultimately, though, it is literary context that receives the least attention. Mr. Lewis focuses primarily on future novelists' opinions of Smollett, the debt that they owe to him, and parallels between his work and theirs. He often illustrates these connections through litanies of works and names, such as when he invokes "William Makepeace Thackeray, George Gissing, Cyril Connolly and Julien Maclaren-Ross" to emphasize Smollett's place in a tradition of "great chroniclers of literary life." By treating his audience as if they are already literary insiders, Mr. Lewis risks reinforcing their sense of exclusion if they fail to recognize these figures. His audience of general readers and introductory students might benefit more from information about the literary trends of the period that inform Smollett's work, such as the picaresque or the literature of sentiment—neither of which is included. While Mr. Lewis notes that Smollett is "dutifully listed among the founders of the English novel," he offers little historical information about the rise of that genre during the period or the au-

thor's contribution to it, other than that ''an epistolary novel involving five letter writers is . . . far more advanced than anything attempted by Samuel Richardson or Frances (Fanny) Burney.'' Such evaluative comments pervade the Introduction, as Mr. Lewis encourages readers to ''sample one of the funniest, most boisterous and most observant of British novelists,'' while at the same time warning them away from most of his works. ''*Roderick Random* and *Humphry Clinker* are the only novels by Smollett which are still worth reading,'' he informs them—the others being ''dim,'' ''implausible,'' ''over-long,'' and ''tedious.'' One wonders how he can blame Smollett's lack of popularity on ''academic critics who prefer their novelists to be difficult and obscure (Sterne) or sententious and long-winded (Fielding),'' since these are some of the very qualities that Mr. Lewis attributes to the bulk of the author's oeuvre.

An accomplished biographer of Smollett, though, Mr. Lewis is more interested in the man than in his culture. Consequently, the Introduction is driven by a detailed account of the author's life, which sometimes sounds like a eulogy for an old friend. We are asked to like the author for being ''at heart, a kindly man''; to grieve with him when his ''beloved daughter died at age fifteen''; and to welcome him back from the continent to his comfortable lodgings at Golden Square, ''just round the corner from his Scottish friend William Hunter's lecture hall and anatomy collection.'' While Smollett's relationship with Wilkes illuminates the novel's politics, other accounts seem gratuitous. Mr. Lewis admits as much when, after spending two pages on Smollett's career as a ship's doctor, he explains that ''the naval motif is less in evidence in *Humphry Clinker*'' than in the author's other novels. When Mr. Lewis offers interpretations of the novel itself, he consistently emphasizes its ''strong elements of autobiography'' by juxtaposing the opinions of Smollett and his ''alter-ego,'' Matthew Bramble. The Introduction is dedicated to reinforcing the ''author-before-the-work.''

Arguably, the knowledge of concepts, not authors—of structures of feeling, not the feelings of an individual—makes literature come alive for new readers. The ability to define the ''man of feeling,'' for example, and to understand that figure's cultural significance enables them to explore how and why the novel is employing rhetoric associated with it. Smollett's emotional response to his daughter's death, while touching, cannot lead to such discoveries. Alas, we still lack an affordable edition that promotes this kind of engagement with the novel, which would be a helpful first step toward returning *Humphry Clinker* to its rightful place in literary and cultural history.

This edition's advantage over the Oxford is its much larger print. While the Oxford offers the first edition in its virgin state, Penguin has chosen the fourth edition of 1772. The editor has also updated ''typographical variations'' in punctuation ''to the forms closest to modern use'' and substituted ''on occasion readings from the earlier editions,'' though it is not quite clear why or where. It would have been helpful had the endnotes identified these substitutions. The Notes are otherwise extremely helpful in navigating Smollett's historical allusions and vocabulary, but the editor's decision to organize them by letter might make individual notes hard to locate, since many letters have the same title (''To Dr Lewis'') and the endnote numbers start over again for each one. It would have

been more helpful to organize the notes by page number.

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W. B. GERARD. *Laurence Sterne and the Visual Imagination*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006. Pp. xvi + 251. £ 25.

The last two decades have seen rich publications on eighteenth-century word and image relations. Norman Bryson's studies in "New Art History," Barbara Stafford's works on visual culture, W. J. T. Mitchell's semiotic iconology, and Peter Wagner's discussions of "iconotexts" have opened new ways to explore the range of eighteenth-century verbal-visual relations. Mr. Gerard's *Laurence Sterne and the Visual Imagination* is the first monograph on the illustrations of Sterne's novels, and how the verbal pictorialism of Sterne's works appealed the readers' visual imagination as well as to their sympathetic and creative engagement with the text. Illustrations of Sterne's novels also reflect how attitudes toward Sterne, his novels, and the discourses underlying them (especially sensibility) changed in the course of the following two centuries. Thus, Mr. Gerard explains how the depictions of Corporal Trim reading the sermon reflect changing ideas on Sterne and on the concept of the written text. Illustrations of *A Sentimental Journey*, discussed alongside illustrations of MacKenzie's *Man of Feeling*, reveal shifting attitudes toward sentimentalism.

Combining textual and pictorial analysis with a discussion of contemporary cultural and aesthetic discourses, the author's close readings of the illustrations give a deeper insight into the reception of Sterne as an author of sentimentalism. Some of Mr. Gerard's conclusions take issue with current opinions. He demonstrates that the appeal of sentimentalism to sympathy was no exclusive, elitist affair, but included members of all classes by understanding sympathy as a general humane feature. Other findings are more predictable. The shift from idealizing sensibility to its criticism, rejection, and medicalization to a pathological state (see Chapter 5 on "Poor Maria") is hardly surprising for anyone who has read *Sense and Sensibility*, or who is familiar with studies on femininity (especially the treatment of "hysteria") in the Victorian period. The same holds true for the book's take on verbal pictorialism and on the function of illustrations: "the visual imagination of the individual reader . . . is crucial to the affective impact of textual description and the consequent mental completion of the verbally inspired picture." This reader-oriented approach, important as the insight to the reader's active part may be, leaves the reader of Mr. Gerard's study with the question of how this visual imagination can be critically assessed—especially when dealing with texts of earlier centuries.

What strikes me most about Mr. Gerard's book, however, is the absence of by now well-established discourses in word and image studies. This becomes apparent in the first two chapters explaining the author's idea of pictorialism and his method. By suggesting completeness and depth as the main criteria for pictorialism, Mr. Gerard at first appears to ignore that pictures are full of gaps, too. This statement is later revised in favor of the imaginative imperative of pictures—a revision that is necessary to answer the question of why Sterne's descriptions may appear pictorial despite their apparent incompleteness, in contrast to the works of Fielding, Smollett, or Hogarth. I have found Mr. Gerard's fundamental chapters irritating: it ought to be